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SUBJECT: EAP Deputy Assistant Secretary Eric John's Meeting with Foreign Minister Nguyen Zy Nien

1. (SBU) Summary: EAP Deputy Assistant Secretary Eric John discussed bilateral relations and regional cooperation with Foreign Minister Nguyen Zy Nien on September 27. After emphasizing the value of senior-level visits and exchanges and asking DAS John to help encourage more of them, FM Nien requested that the United States help Vietnam enter the World Trade Organization (WTO) quickly by reducing its demands in the negotiating process. He offered support for U.S. efforts to secure a new location for the U.S. Embassy and pledged to continue improving cooperation on religious freedom and human rights in Vietnam. End Summary.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSON-TO-PERSON DIPLOMACY

2. (SBU) EAP Deputy Assistant Secretary Eric John, who was joined by the Ambassador, EAP Mainland Southeast Asia Director Scot Marciel and EconOff, met with Foreign Minister Nguyen Zy Nien on September 27, the second in a series of meetings on the U.S.-Vietnam bilateral relationship and cooperation on regional issues. Having been briefed by Assistant Foreign Minister Nguyen Duc Hung, who had just concluded his own exchange with DAS John (septel), FM Nien began the meeting by reviewing the results of his recent trip to New York to participate in the annual meeting of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), expressing his appreciation for the opportunity to speak with Secretary Rice (as part of a larger meeting with ASEAN Foreign Ministers). He noted that he had personally invited Secretary Rice to Hanoi for the 2006 APEC Leaders' Meeting.

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High-level visits are extremely important to developing the bilateral relationship, Nien added, citing Prime Minister Phan Van Khai's June visit to the United States as an example of how much these exchanges can accomplish. The Foreign Minister asked DAS John to help increase the number and frequency of these senior-level exchanges and visits, emphasizing how very important they are to developing a mutual understanding. DAS John agreed with these observations, and added that creating a stronger business environment and investment climate will also increase opportunities for public diplomacy efforts, in addition to improving the overall trade flow.

3. (SBU) FM Nien also mentioned another kind of person-to-person diplomacy: the interactions and trade taking place between Vietnamese-Americans and the Vietnamese people living in Vietnam. He cited his recent visit to the home of a Vietnamese-American family in Long Beach (on Long Island, NY) that frequently travels back and forth to Vietnam on business as one example of how much the younger generations of Vietnamese people on both sides of the Pacific have become more comfortable with each other, bringing business and cultural opportunities to the United States and to Vietnam through their exchanges.

AVIAN INFLUENZA AND HIV/AIDS

4. (SBU) Senior-level visits, FM Nien added, also help the United States and Vietnam cooperate on health issues such as HIV/AIDS and avian influenza. The latter problem, he said, is something Vietnam continues to try to control, but bird migrations make it difficult to do so. He noted that President Bush's remarks on the importance of the International Partnership on Avian and Pandemic Influenza (IPAPI) were well received at the UNGA.

WTO

5. (SBU) The Foreign Minister then turned to the issue of Vietnam's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO). "The United States is the most important country left [that has not given its approval]," he opined. He added that "if the United States says it is ok, then all [the remaining countries] will say it is ok." He concluded by saying that he hopes the United States will reduce the number of demands

it is still making in the negotiating rounds since it would be better if Vietnam could accede to the WTO by December. DAS John replied that Vietnam's WTO accession will take place more quickly if Vietnam improves the quality of its offer. A better trade picture, he added, benefits both the United States and Vietnam, as the results of our Bilateral Trade Agreement demonstrate.

APEC

16. (SBU) Referring to Vietnam's designation as the host of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) 2006, FM Nien shared that Vietnam is already working on security issues to prepare for senior-level visitors, especially President Bush. DAS John replied that APEC is an excellent opportunity for Vietnam to showcase its strengths and to establish new bilateral opportunities for businesses and investors. He added that U.S. Senior Official for APEC and EAP/FO Economic Coordinator Mike Michalak will be visiting Hanoi in early October to further discuss APEC 2006 with Vietnamese officials.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, TRAFFICKING, AND HUMAN RIGHTS

17. (SBU) FM Nien voiced his regret over the fact that Vietnam is still listed as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for religious freedom. Hopefully, the CPC list will not stand in the way of a better understanding of human rights in Vietnam. He cited his own family's strong Buddhist beliefs and his experiences in visiting Catholic communities, and stressed that he understands well that religion is a beneficial element in social development. Local problems that result from a miscommunication with provincial and district authorities are few and far between, he argued, and added that religious groups actually support - not threaten - the autonomy and authority of local officials. DAS John replied that the United States does not want Vietnam to be on the CPC list either, but that there are still some improvements that need to take place, especially in the implementation of laws protecting religious freedom, before Vietnam can be removed from it. Recognizing that implementation at the local level is difficult, DAS John noted that increased education and training for those officials might improve their understanding of how to properly protect religious freedoms. Vietnam's improvements in countering drug trafficking is a model to follow, since those efforts resulted in Vietnam's removal from the Majors' List. FM Nien agreed that this was a positive step forward and that Vietnam would continue to do its best in these areas.

18. (SBU) In response to DAS John's comment that the United States hopes to resume its results-based Human Rights Dialogue with Vietnam once our Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor is in office, FM Nien thanked DAS John and observed that cooperation on this issue and others from the Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of National Defense and Vietnamese military is critical, since the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would otherwise be left isolated in its efforts to expand the overall bilateral relationship.

NEW EMBASSY

19. (SBU) FM Nien expressed appreciation for the Mission's hard work in establishing a new location for the U.S. Embassy, noting that the agreed minute of the July talks is complete and that only a few formalities remain, formalities which should be taken care of before the end of the week. He explained that Vietnam wants to have good relations with big powers like the United States and China, and thus supports our request for a more appropriate home for our operations.

110. (SBU) DAS John cleared this cable.

MARINE